

THE *Final* Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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REFLECTIONS OF A JEWISH ANTI-ZIONIST FROM PALESTINE

The Final Straw Radio - November 19, 2023



We're featuring the voice of a Jewish anti-Zionist anarchist living in lands occupied by the Israeli state. We speak about some of his experiences of trying to resist the ongoing war against Palestinians, collaboration with Palestinian comrades against the occupation, the silencing of dissent during the escalation by the Israeli state and other topics.

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Anonymous: So, I was born and have been living all of my time in Jerusalem, in Al-Quds. Palestine-Israel. I'm an anti-Zionist Jew and have been active in joint-Palestinian-Jewish struggles against occupation and Zionism since 2012. And in recent years, since Covid started, I've been active in mutual aid and food rescue groups in Jerusalem. Two groups that I've been involved with in the West Bank are Taayoush, which is active in the South Hebron hills and especially in the area of Masafer Yatta and Free Jerusalem, which is active in Al-Quds / Jerusalem, both in the eastern and the western part of the city.

TFSR: Are these groups both mostly made up of settlers, or are they mixed between Palestinians and Israelis?

Anonymous: Well, Taayoush began 20 years ago in the second Intifada, as a joint Jewish Palestinian group, it used to be much bigger than it is now. Used to be hundreds of people and over the years, it got smaller and smaller. During the time that I've been active — I've also had breaks in activism, like I wasn't active all the time since 2012 — but in the years that I was or have been active with Taayoush there were almost no Palestinians. Obviously, the activity itself is shared because we go and stand with Palestinians in the West Bank, but in terms of activists that are a part of the group itself then these days it's actually only Jews. There was one Palestinian activist that I knew during my time, and Free Jerusalem is pretty much the same. I mean, the core, the actual activists, again, we are being active with Palestinians in Jerusalem, with local activists, but the group itself is almost only Jewish activists, like there was one or two Palestinians.

The Final Straw Radio: So, initially you had introduced yourself as a Jewish anti-Zionist activist from Palestine, rather than as a Palestinian or an Israeli. Can you talk about the complexity of identities a bit in terms of like, do you identify in that the lands, all the land, being occupied Palestine? Or are you saying that...can you sort of break that down a little bit?

A: Uh yeah. I mean, generally I usually don't focus so much on identity questions, personally. because I prefer acting with other people on the basis of a shared goal, rather than acting based on a shared identity. But I mean, the fact remains that I am a Jewish Israeli citizen, with all the privileges that gives me under the Zionist colonial regime. I will probably get, soon, to the functional privileges, what it means. And I think it's important for most of us as anti-Zionist Jews to emphasize differences between Judaism and Zionism. That's why I prefer to call myself an anti-Zionist Jew, rather than Israeli.

I see this piece of land—I'm an anarchist, so it's also complicated stuff [laughs]. But obviously I see all of this land is occupied, and I identify with the Palestinian struggle for freedom, and for independence, but I don't believe in states in general. It's not like I dream about one Palestinian state instead of one Israeli state.

Also over the years it became harder and harder to imagine the future here,

can list a few names of Palestinian activists in the West Bank that people can follow. Several activists from Masafer Yatta area include Basel Adra, Ali Awad, Sami H Huraini, Youth of Sumud, and Awdah Hathaleen. And Ayman Graieb was active mostly in the Jordan Valley in the east of Ramallah.

It's really important that these people, not only that their voices are heard, but that they are known worldwide because they are under threat personally because Israel targets nonviolent activists. Israel likes to say that it fights terrorism, but I think that the state prefers the violent struggle over the nonviolent one. We can see the way they treat nonviolent activists and also press.

I would also recommend the following Activestills Collective, which is a cooperative of photographers, Palestinian and Jewish, that are in Gaza and the West Bank. They're really cool.

TFSR: I guess those are the questions that I had. Thank you very much for having this conversation, and in English, I really appreciate it.

A: Thank you. Thank you so much.

ative ways to do that. Especially in comparison to what Palestinians have been going through.

TFSR: So being that the US is a settler colonial state that has a lot of ties — both because of dual citizenship, as well as military and business and governmental ties between the two states... For instance, I know the struggle against Cop City and in Atlanta, in the US, has been a struggle that has partially been defined by the fact that police here train and share tactics with police and military in Israel. That awareness is there that there's a connection between the two.

I wonder if you know of any, or have any ideas about places, ways, points of pressure that people in the so-called US or abroad could apply pressure to not only call for a ceasefire, but press towards Palestinian liberation? Which seems like a whole nother conversation, I guess, like huge steps beyond just getting the current incursions to stop. Do you have any ideas about how internationals could help?

A: You can look at what Palestine Action is doing, has been doing for several years. In the UK, they have a specific goal in mind, they said that they want to focus on an achievable goal while also talking about general Zionist colonialism and the occupation. But they have an achievable goal which is shutting down Elbit factories in the UK, and they succeeded in doing so. I don't remember exactly how many factories were shut down but they managed to shut down at least one or two.

I think the US is probably harder. As a state it considers itself to be the biggest ally of Israel or something. Many people in the US are supportive of Israel and I don't really know what the Palestine Solidarity movement looks like in the US, actually.

Applying pressure to governments seems, I mean, so far seems, not...it didn't bring a lot of success so far. Not in the US, not in Europe. We know they don't care, we know that Joe Biden doesn't care [scoffs]. But if there are mass demonstrations that make people realize what's going on, then that's a lot. Also, maybe focusing on, like, the Elbit factories in the UK — I know that there was a shipment, or there was a ship that was blocked in the US, right? I'm not sure where.

TFSR: Yeah, it was blocked for a little bit from loading in Oakland, I think. And then later people attempted to block it in Tacoma in Washington, but I think it was able to load, maybe offshore, load weapons up.

A: Mhm. These kinds of actions sound really important, it's kind of stuff that we can never dream of doing here. It's not like...we would be shot at, I think. It's not possible. If people in the US and Europe can use their privileges and the fact that there is a little bit more room to express yourself in these countries — I don't know how much, but a little bit more than here — of course do so.

I think another important thing is really sharing Palestinian voices, and I

like, concretely. Like “the solution is two states, one state” I think we lost interest in this kind of conversation because we'd rather be focused on the little stuff that we can do, and the solidarity, and creating connections for a better future.

Like I said, generally I support Palestinian struggle for freedom, and it means also the return of the refugees to their homes. Also, within the [19]48 borders, what's now called the state of Israel, not just in the occupied territories. And it's all over, like, where I live in Jerusalem many neighborhoods used to be Palestinian before 48, and in the other big cities, Tel Aviv, Haifa and many, many, many places. So yeah, I do believe that all of these places should return in some way, to the people who used to live there and their descendants. And I hope that we can still coexist somehow.

TFSR: I wonder if you could talk about a shared Palestinian and Israeli struggle against the occupation of Palestine as you've experienced it over the last few years, or at least since 2012. Particularly, I'm interested in the last few years, is the struggle possible anymore amidst this onslaught?

A: Maybe I'll start with a disclaimer, because I think the general stance of me and my activist friends/community is that this current Israeli government, as fascist and murderous as it is, didn't bring anything really new. We're not doing a history class but this state was established with the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, which never stopped to this day. So I say this disclaimer, because it is true that not only since the war but since this new government came to power about a year ago, the situation did get worse and the ethnic cleansing methods in the West Bank got more extreme. But still, it's important to stress that it's the same method that have gotten more extreme, it's not new methods. And it's not a new goal of this regime to ethnically cleanse Palestine. They only changed how they do it and how extended they do it. Anyway...

If we talk about how solidarity activity used to be in the last few years, usually, it's to go and accompany shepherds and farmers in the West Bank, and especially into areas that are called Masafer Yatta and the Jordan Valley, areas where many shepherds and farmers were denied access to their lands by both the army and settlers. We used to go and document home demolitions or demolitions of water sources, sometimes help preparing and building infrastructure or help with the olive harvest. All kinds of standing with Palestinians.

Also a major part of the solidarity activism was joining Palestinian demonstrations across the West Bank. If you heard about Anarchists Against the Wall, we used to join these demonstrations for years. Sadly, they not active anymore.

Of course, there was always much violence, both by the army and settlers, because this violence is inherent to the occupation. Especially when we're talking about the demonstrations in the West Bank, in which dozens were killed over the years in places like Bil'in, Ni'lin, Nabi Saleh, Beita, Beit Dajan, and there's a long list.

However, in the last year or so activists started to get calls from communi-

ties to stay 24/7 for protective presence in villages due to increased army and settler violence. I'm stressing the word "army" before settlers because it's important to clarify that settler violence is a tool of the Zionist colonial regime and not an extreme part of it. And also, many times, it's hard to tell between soldiers and settlers, because they cooperate and they come together to attack. These days it's even harder to differentiate between them because they all dress the same, and they both have weapons. So it's like two tools of that state: one is military and one is citizens who have weapons, but they cooperate.

Over the last year or so, small communities that we used to be active with in the ways that I mentioned, were forced to leave their homes because of the increased violence and because their lives are in danger. If we can mention some names of villages: Simri and Widady, and Masafer Yatta in South Hebron Hills area; and Ein Samiya, Ras al-Tin and al-Qabun in Jordan Valley, and the area east of Ramallah.

All of that was even before the war started before October 7. It's still early to tell but since October 7, at least 13 more communities — a thousand people — were forced to leave their homes in the West Bank because of this increased violence, even more increased. That's according to statistics from B'Tselem. Obviously it's just the start, we don't know where it's heading.

I personally wasn't on the ground as much in recent weeks, but friends who were on the ground had to see, in front of their eyes, communities that they know personally, and have been standing with, they had to see them leaving their homes being subjected to violence.

If we talk about East Jerusalem, so since 2009, every week there is a demonstration in neighborhood called Sheikh Jarrah, which is both against the occupation and Zionism in general, but also it's about evictions of families, of Palestinian families in the neighborhood in favor of Jewish settlers who take their homes. Israeli Jewish solidarity activists have been a part of these demos since the beginning, since 2009. There are ups and downs in terms of how the police reacts to this. There are times that there are a lot of arrests and a lot of violence and other times, there was less. In the last few months, the Israeli police started enforcing the complete ban on Palestine flags, on the raising the Palestine flag. We saw it personally especially in the Sheikh Jarrah demos.

Every week — locals, Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah — and solidarity activists were arrested. There was a lot of police violence. Sadly, since the war started, since October 7th, the demos don't take place at all. For the first time since 2009, because people are barely allowed to sit in the streets in East Jerusalem these days without being arrested or subjected to police violence, let alone protest or raise their voice.

To answer the question if this type of activism is still doable, I mean, it's still happening. But what we can do and how much we can affect the situation is decreasing...it feels like every day. It feels like our power in front of the Israeli forces are getting weaker every day. And it's hard.

As things have escalated to such a war as they are right now, what can anti-Zionist settlers do? If protests aren't possible in the street, if people are being beaten up for having the Palestinian flag, do you see any possible directions of struggle that anti-Zionist Jews can participate in that's effective?

A: Well, I think there's three different areas where we act in. One is inside 48, including Jerusalem, for instance. The second is the West Bank. The third is online. All three are harder right now because, like you said, inside 48 demonstrations are not really allowed to happen. And yet, people try.

Also, there is a difference between how the police in Jerusalem responds and the police in other places responds. The police in Jerusalem are especially brutal. We have to think how we respond to the recent events here, see if we can do stuff a little bit differently. Also to protect ourselves because it's not like we weren't beaten before or weren't subjected to violence before and the rest, but I think now it's more dangerous to have to think how we can also protect ourselves. Which we usually don't, we didn't think like that until now as much.

In the West Bank, there is still solidarity activists around doing protective presence. Also, you can read about what happens in a place called Wadi al-Siq a week after October 7. It's one of those villages that there has been protective presence of solidarity activists for several months, because of settler violence. That day, the army and settlers came together and they just took all the activists to one place and they beat them. They took them to a tent and they let armed settlers guard them there. So they don't get out and they don't document, they broke all the cameras, all the phones, either broke them or took them. All the Palestinian men, the soldiers and settlers took to a different place and just -- there's horrible stories about what happened that are brutal assaults. There was an article in Haaretz, the Israeli journal, about this. Some of my friends were there, they heard from them also, personally, what happened, but they didn't see everything.

That's an example of how also on the West Bank activities are becoming more and more, well, harder. We feel weaker and weaker in front of what's going on. We still enjoy our privileges as Jews, the Israeli citizens. In terms of, like I said, when we are arrested, we are tried in a court and not in the military court and treated better. But it seems like also on the West Bank, they don't let us do what we, more or less, managed to do before. There were always problems. Of course, always. There was violence, always. There were arrests, always. But the opportunities to affect the realities get smaller and smaller. For sure.

Online, like I said, even Jewish Israeli citizens are arrested for posting stuff. Not only arrested, there's a big, right wing nationalist, obviously, movement in Israel and one of their main targets right now is activists. They look for stuff that people are posting, and they share their info, doxxing and all this kind of stuff.

On the other hand, we don't really know what's going to happen and we have to keep trying. Like I said, we still enjoy privileges, we still can raise our voices more than Philistines can. We just have to keep trying and find new ways and cre-

and the guest spoke about mass arrests and administrative sentences for Palestinians for things as simple as putting things on social media, or materials found on their phones when they get stopped at the many, many checkpoints that they have to go through in the West Bank, or in other communities. I'm not sure if you could speak to the difference in repercussions that different people experienced in that way.

A: Yeah, I mean, first of all, because I'm not Palestinian and I haven't gone as often in the last few weeks to the West Bank as before, maybe I'm not the best person to answer that, but I can say what I know. First of all, in general, even the tool of administrative detention is a tool that's being used on all Palestinians. This tool allows Israel to arrest people on the basis of the fear that they would maybe do something and not based on something they already did. This almost never happens to Jewish Israeli citizens. Israel uses this tool against Palestinians in huge amounts. I think recently, a couple of thousands of Palestinians are being held using administrative detention.

That's not a new tool, but recently it's been used a lot more and probably for longer sentences. I mean, it's not technically sentences because people are being held under administrative detention, they don't go to regular courts like Israeli citizens would. They're tried in military courts, and these courts have almost a 100% conviction rate. This whole process is nothing like the process of a trial that is known in "democracies", if we can call them that.

Many people — I heard from friends in the West Bank — when they just go around, soldier system, the first thing the soldier does is take their phone and see if they even watched a video or saw a photo from Gaza from the war. It is considered illegal now to do that, if you're Palestinian, even to watch a video.

Then they either arrested the person, or they break his phone. I've even heard about incidents of breaking the phone on people's heads. Obviously, a lot of violence. And also the freedom of movement in the West Bank is even more restricted now. People that I know didn't go to work for weeks because the entrance to the places they live were blocked, and even after they are not blocked anymore they're just scared to go around. It means lots of people lose their jobs and their ability to provide for their families.

Also there's a lot of raids, like even if people don't go around [leave their houses], there's a lot of raids. The army and settlers go into villages, into towns, into cities, and arrest people from their homes. Sounds like there isn't anywhere really safe in the West Bank right now, even when you're not talking about Gaza, obviously nowhere in the West Bank is safe right now. This is the situation.

TFSR: It seems like the closer the more integrated people get across that boundary that the settler state draws, between settler and Palestinian, the harsher the consequences for settlers, whereas the consequences have always been harsh for the Palestinians because the settler state just doesn't want them to exist.

TFSR: Yeah, and for whatever this counts, the Israeli state has said that it made protests illegal because they considered that it pulls resources away from what they're doing in Gaza, or in parts of the West Bank more actively as military engagements.

A: Well, first of all, maybe it's important to say that in the West Bank, it's not a new thing. Any kind of demonstration is illegal under the occupation, since the occupation, since '67. Since the occupation itself. When Palestinians demonstrate in the West Bank, the Israeli army almost always uses rubber bullets, tear gas, stun grenades, and sometimes live ammunition. In the West Bank, it's nothing new that demonstrations are illegal.

TFSR: Moreso what I meant was that I heard that the Israeli state is saying that protests in [the borders of 19] 48 are illegal because it pulls resources from the military activities that they're doing in the other occupied territories.

A: Yeah, I mean, I'm not sure about the legal stance of the Israeli state about administrations right now, I know that they use a lot of laws that can be used in war times, which they do anyway in the West Bank, but now they also use it inside 48. But on the ground, we see that they don't allow, like, they practically don't allow it, it's true. Like the first demo that I personally joined, and it was on Thursday, I mean, since October 7th, it was on Thursday, it wasn't even...it's hard to call it a demonstration at all actually. We just stood there in front of the — maybe I would not say the name of the place (laughs) — we just stood with that with empty signs and black tape on our mouths. And we didn't say anything. Immediately the police responded with batons and fists and kicking, and some people were injured. They just chased us across the city for an hour.

In Tel Aviv, at the same time, there was a protest and the police arrested 20 people. And if we talk about Palestinians wanting to demonstrate inside 48, then they arrest people before the demonstrations even begin. They arrested 3 ex-Parliament's members, 3 Palestinian ex-Parliament members, just for trying to plan a demonstration against the war. So it never came to be. Practically, they don't really allow any kind of, not only demonstrations, any raising of voice against what's going on.

I can expand on some stories. In the recent weeks a Jewish activist friend was arrested from his home because someone on the street saw a sign on his balcony, an anti-occupation sign. This person in the streets called the police, the police came and arrested him brutally. They torn the sign and they took some little Palestine flags that they found. He was [detained] for several hours and harassed by the cops, they said terrible stuff to him before he was released that night.

A teacher was arrested because of stuff he posted online against the war and criticizing the Israeli military. He was [detained] for four days, and then the court decided to let him go for four days and they banned him from using social

media. And both stories are about Jewish dissidents, so if we're talking about Palestinian dissidents, we know many, many people were fired, or arrested or both, just because they posted something online. Like I said about those ex-Parliament members, there are many stories like that. This is the situation right now.

TFSR: Just step back for a second, when you were saying that it's kind of hard to tell the difference between settlers and the army or the police, it's the situation for Israeli citizens that they have to take some sort of time in one of the government services and usually that's in police or military, right?

A: True. Every Jewish Israeli citizen has to do almost three years — I mean for men it's almost three years, women it's almost two years — in the military, and sometimes in the police. More the police.

TFSR: Obviously there's staffing that that resolves (laughs), but that also seems like it would be a function of creating an “us versus them”, like integrating people into a nationalist position that supports the occupying force, emotionally as well as integrating them into policing Arab and Palestinian bodies and life.

A: Definitely. Yeah, we all grew up, like all Jewish Israelis — except for Ultra-Orthodox Jews, which is a different story — but if we're talking about secular or “light” religious Jews in Israel then we all grew up in a very militaristic and nationalist Israeli society. Everything is aiming towards going to the army when you become 18. Kindergarten, school, etc. For instance, there are programs almost in every school, like a joint program of the Army in the school that students go to field day trainings with the military.

Also, if at all, people learn Arabic in high school, then they learn it for the purposes of the intelligence of the Israeli military. Explicitly, it's not something that's hidden, soldiers come teach classes and things.

And yeah, for sure, I think one of the successes of the Zionist regime is because so many people here go to the army and they identify completely, mentally, with the state, and with the army. They see every criticism of the army as a criticism of themselves, or their families. So I'm so grateful, personally, that I didn't go to the army.

TFSR: Considering how hard the Zionist state works at, and how successful it is, at integrating people into an emotionally, physically, familiarly, socially— can you talk about instances, maybe even just generalized, when people such as yourself decided to speak out or broke with that consensus idea? Anecdotally what sort of examples have created circumstances where people haven't been allowed, or allowed themselves to integrate in. There have been movements in the past, like the refuseniks through various iter-

ations to not join the military, or to not conduct certain operations, and I haven't heard about that sort of thing in a decade. I wonder if you have any sense of if there's a way to break the settler mindset, at least, because that seems like a first step towards some sort of solidarity.

A: First of all, if we talk about refusal in the last decades where there is a movement of people who refuse to go to the army, they even have a name, they're called Mesarvot. You can find them online, on Instagram or Facebook or whatever. It's a group of young people who decided not to join the army. Many of them are also active in the West Bank, or in East Jerusalem against the occupation. That's important to say. In general, unfortunately, very few people break away from these mindsets. I personally was kind of lucky, I guess, because my mom is not a Zionist. She didn't talk to me a lot about that as a kid, it definitely helped. She did talk to me sometimes about that.

I can say about myself that when there was another massacre in Gaza by Israel in 2008-2009, I just started reading online, a lot, about the occupation and resistance to the occupation. As soon as I became 18, I just decided to go and join one of the groups that are active in the West Bank. I think, then, breaking away from Zionism itself as an ideology, comes to us from learning about the Nakba, mostly, because you realize that the state was built on ethnic cleansing, massive ethnic cleansing. Jews didn't come here to an empty land, they actually, again, built a state on kicking out hundreds of thousands of people.

Then you also go to the West Bank and meet people who became refugees two or three times in their lives because they were kicked out in 48 and then again in 1967, or after that. There has been a lot of ethnic cleansing going on in the West Bank since the occupation in 67. You start seeing everything through this perspective.

When you walk around and see old houses, in Jerusalem or in many other cities, and you realize that people used to live there and you see everything through this lens. But everyone gets through it differently, I think. Obviously, today, the internet is a big part of it, like we talked about. Like you said, refuseniks 20 or 30 years ago didn't have the internet. They couldn't read about and watch videos of stuff going on in the occupied territories. I can really appreciate how they came to this decision not to serve the military. Back then also the percentage of people who didn't go to the military was much smaller even then today. It was a very, very rare thing.

TFSR: You mentioned some of the consequences anti-Zionist Israeli citizens that have been protesting, such as being batoned or beaten by the police, or arrested for a day or even four days in some instances. I wonder if you could speak about what you know about the repercussions for some of the Palestinians that are arrested for resisting currently.

I was recently listening to the latest episode of It'sGoingDown podcast where Scott Campbell spoke with Palestinian activist in the West Bank,